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SUBJECT: 1967's Estimative Record: Five Years Later

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. A retrospective assessment should avoid being either a whitewash or an exercise in masochism. Of necessity, it must concentrate on the more important issues and papers, since encyclopedic coverage would only weary the reader. (In 1967 ONE turned out 67 NIEs and SNIEs and over 80 estimative memoranda.) The attached discussion focusses primarily on the score or so of estimates which seem to be the most important and on a few of the memoranda which dealt with major issues of 1967.

2. Each of the estimates discussed herein contains a goodly number of estimative sentences. Some are easy or obvious estimates, for which we should take no credit. Some estimative judgments are contained in conditional clauses, e.g., if relations remain cool, then certain developments are likely to occur. There is an implicit estimate in the "if" clause, and if we were off on this one, the following judgments are of little value whether they turn out to be true or not. Many of our estimative sentences, and indeed whole estimates, are based on contingencies. If the contingency never came about, or has not yet occurred, we have no way of knowing whether we were right or wrong. One of our estimates in 1967, SNIE 20-67, Foreign Reactions to Certain US Courses of Action Regarding US Forces in Europe, discusses

three specific cases of unilateral US withdrawal from Europe: in actual fact, none were employed, hence the validity of the estimate cannot be evaluated. NIE 75/76-67, The Horn of Africa, contains an estimate of the likely repercussions of the death of Haile Selassie. Since the Emperor is still alive, this part of the estimate is in a kind of limbo.

3. Theoretically the best estimate is the one which is wrong, i.e., the warning in the estimate comes through so persuasively that policy makers, upon reading the estimate, take measures to prevent or minimize the danger. In this case the dire events do not happen and the estimate, though "wrong", turns out to be a triumph for the estimator. But, this is a rare case, indeed.

4. Most estimates contain a number of fairly important estimative judgments, and some lesser ones. If all of the minor estimates in a paper are right, but a major one is clearly wrong, then the paper as a whole probably rates a bad mark. One of the major difficulties in reviewing old estimates is that so many of the judgments were partly right and partly wrong. Another problem is that many of the estimative phases were couched in terms which are hard to

judge in retrospect. If, for example, we estimated that the political stability of an undeveloped country looked fairly good, but that much depended upon continued rule of a strong prime minister, how should we judge our assessment, if, in fact, the ruler was overturned and the country fell into political confusion? If an estimate forecast the deployment of a major Soviet weapon system by a given date, but it actually was deployed a year earlier or a year later, is the estimate wrong? How wrong?

5. In assessing particular estimates in the following sections, we have struggled with these and other problems in a fashion which cannot help being subjective. As a general rule we have excluded what appear to be the lesser judgments of estimative papers as well as those judgments which are not readily susceptible to evaluation. This still leaves a large number of estimative statements, and on the basis of these, we have compiled our review.

II. TOPICS OF GREATEST INTEREST

6. Vietnam, the USSR's military strength, and the USSR's position in the world were clearly of great intelligence and policy interest in 1967. A crisis of nearly equal import between Israel and its Arab neighbors broke out in May and -- involving

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as it did both this country and the USSR -- occupied senior policymaking levels of government.

A. Vietnam

7. 1967 was a year in which the main intelligence issues of the Vietnamese conflict were addressed at length in a number of NIEs. The issues were: communist capabilities for fighting the war in South Vietnam; the significance of Cambodia to the communist effort; and, communist responses to certain hypothetical escalatory actions.

8. Capabilities were discussed mainly in SNIE 14.3-67, which provided work for many hands in the Community through the year and was finally published in November. It was the second big "capabilities" estimate on the Vietnamese war and covered the subject in great detail, with lengthy arguments during coordination on most significant issues. The paper came down heavily on a judgment that communist military strength in South Vietnam was on the decline -- and indeed it was -- but a brief epilogue on strategic options spoiled things by picturing Hanoi as resigned to a "protracted war" of attrition against Allied forces; two months later the Tet '68 offensive occurred.

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9. The Cambodian role in the war was covered in SNIE 57-67 (January) and SNIE 57/1-67 (December). The Sihanoukville supply issue did not surface in all its vigor until 1968, but these earlier estimates were also characterized by spirited coordination sessions. Both papers emerged, however, with a clearly conservative view of Cambodia's role -- present and potential -- as a funnel for arms to VC/NVA forces in South Vietnam; indeed, there was little evidence to support a contrary view. Nonetheless, in retrospect, one might question the reasoning in the January NIE that "it seems unlikely that they (the Vietnamese communists) would rely in any major way on such an uncertain and indirect source (as the Sihanoukville route)." This cast of mind regarding the Sihanoukville route tended to persist through 1968.

10. The third category of papers on Vietnam falls into the "what if" type. In retrospect NIEs of this year -- unlike many of the previous year or two -- were relatively relaxed about Soviet and Chinese reactions to US moves to escalate the conflict. Thus, SNIE 11-11-67, while concluding that US escalation of the war "might" seriously affect a number of bilateral dealings between the USSR and the USA, also stated: "we think it unlikely" that the Soviets would want to provoke a real crisis with the US.

B. Soviet Military Forces

11. NIEs produced in 1967 on Soviet military forces were very general and gave relatively few detailed judgments compared to present-day estimates. NIE 11-14-67, Soviet General Purpose Forces, for instance, was a document of 28 pages which provided only a broad-brush treatment of Warsaw Pact general purpose forces. In contrast, NIE 11-14-71, Warsaw Pact Forces for Operations in Eurasia, was 215 pages long and discussed these forces and their capabilities in great detail.

12. In order to evaluate these NIEs, it is useful to categorize the judgments found in them. Broad general judgments about capabilities and future courses of action have generally held up well; such judgments, while important, are based on an appreciation of a broad range of considerations, not easily subject to change through the appearance of specific new data. Judgments about specific capabilities existing in 1967 have also stood the test of time; they usually had hard evidence to support them, but sometimes did not. Predictions of specific future capabilities and force levels are a more chancy business; estimates have sometimes been right on the mark, but sometimes wide of it. NIEs have often been low on numbers for important force projections, but accorded the Soviets a more rapid growth in weapons technology

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than actually took place. (See paragraphs 17 & 19.) The paragraphs that follow assess a representative group of specific examples of these general statements -- in the areas of air defense, the Soviet navy, the SA-5, ICBM deployment, and MIRVs -- without trying to cover all major judgments.

13. Judgment on an Existing Operational Capability: NIE 11-3-67



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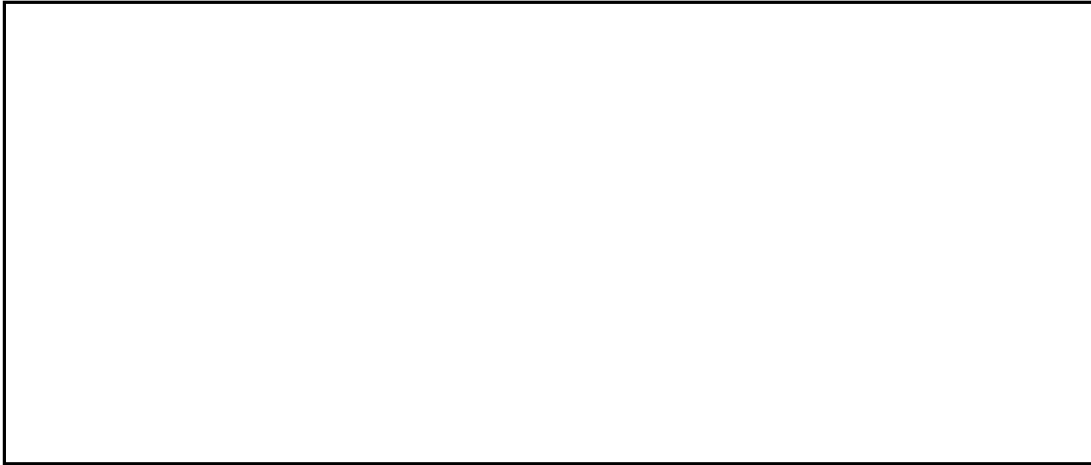
14. Judgment on Mission and an Existing Capability. In 1967



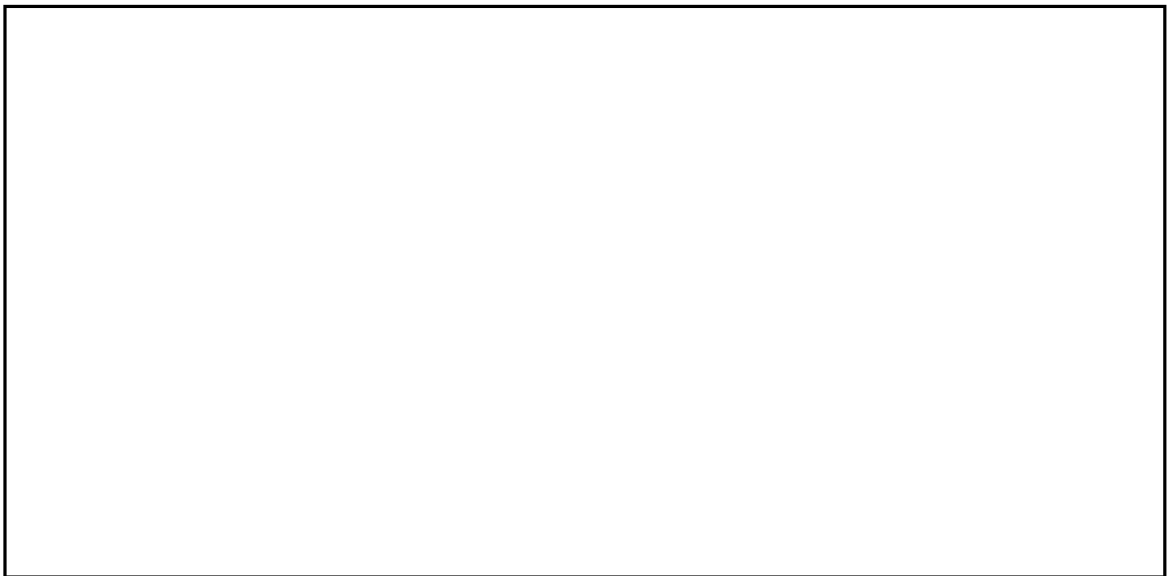
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16. Judgments on General Future Developments. NIE 11-14-67 concluded "The Soviets are well on their way toward developing a large modern Navy as an instrument for the projection of national power...The Soviets are developing forces which, over the longer term, will significantly improve their ability to support their

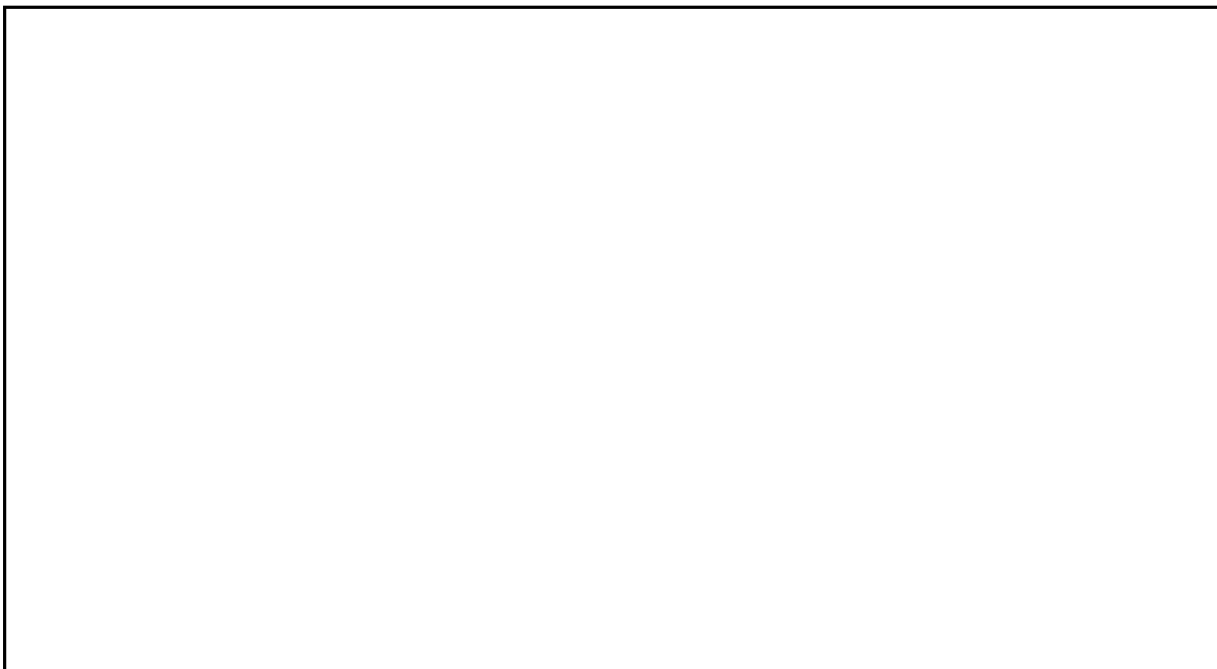
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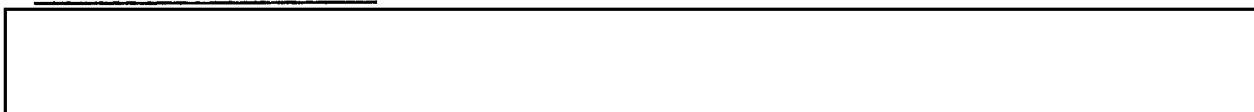
political interests in other parts of the world, but we doubt that they intend to develop a capability to engage in distant limited warfare with a major power," Soviet ship construction, command and control developments, training, and exercises have in the past five years rapidly increased the size and flexibility of the Soviet Navy. A greater number of ships have operated further from home, demonstrating a powerful presence in many sea areas of the world. But the Soviets have not in this time constructed the afloat air or logistic forces to permit them to support distant operations against opposition.

17. Judgments on Specific Future Developments. NIE 11-8-67,

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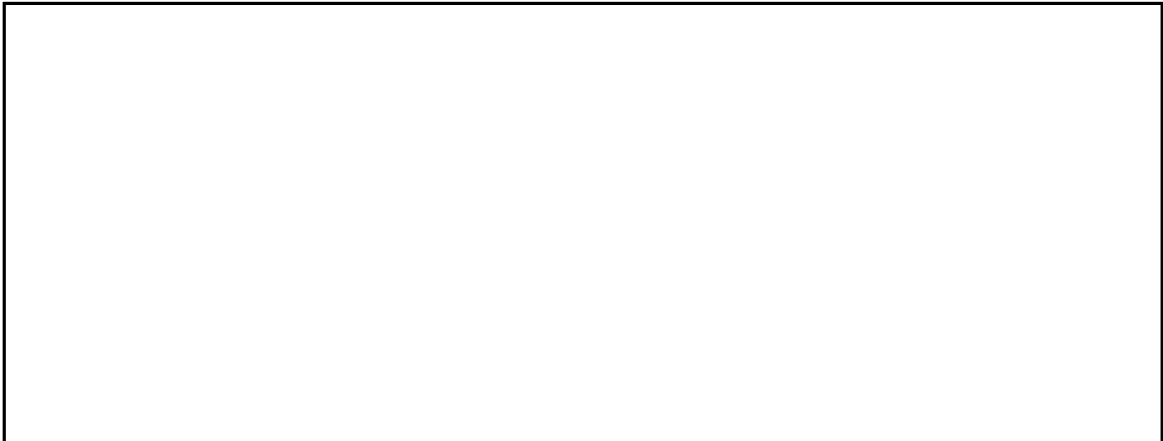
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18. Many specific forecasts of introduction of new weapon systems were close to the mark, as developments then underway worked out in a normal fashion. But in some cases the Soviets met unexpected problems, and predictions were a year or two off.



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19. In other cases we accorded Soviets much too great a capability to introduce important new weapons. NIE 11-8-67 estimated



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20. Any evaluation of NIEs about the Soviet strategic military forces must take into account the phenomenon of action and reaction. While Soviet weapons developments have their own technical and bureaucratic imperatives as do ours, it is also true that policy decisions concerning deployment of these weapons must consider changes in the US strategic military posture as well. Likewise, while it is difficult to explain why a specific US force-oriented decision took place, an appreciation of projected changes in the USSR often enters in. For instance, the estimate that the Soviets could deploy hard target MIRVs by as early as 1972 was used to justify the US decision to deploy ABMs at ICBM complexes. And this decision, in turn, was likely a consideration bringing the Soviets to agree to limitations on ABMs. Such interplay cannot, of course, be specifically documented, as these decisions on both sides are arrived at out of a complex of considerations. But there certainly must have been instances when a judgment in an NIE accurately reflected Soviet intentions at the time, but subsequent US policy decisions -- influenced in part by estimates of what the Soviets would do -- caused the Soviets to reappraise the situation and to alter their course, thereby causing the estimate to appear faulty.

C. The USSR and Its Confrontation with the US

21. A central issue in 1967 as in other years, it tends to be covered in a number of NIEs as the US and USSR compete in different parts of the world. The Soviet response to possible US escalation in Vietnam has been addressed in Section A. And Soviet actions and policies in the Mediterranean and Middle East will provide the transition at the end of this section to the Arab-Israeli crisis.

22. NIE 11-7-67, Soviet Foreign Policy, (September 1967) was the principal estimative paper on the USSR for the year. It covered: (a) The Post-Khrushchev record; (b) Foreign Policy and the Leadership; and (c) Current Issues of Policy. The discussions under these headings emphasized Soviet setbacks, problems, and caution, and it could be said that they did so to a fault. Certainly the paper failed to anticipate the more vigorous Soviet foreign policy evident during the past couple of years. But the emphasis appears appropriate for 1967 and the judgments were generally sound for 1968 and 1969. And the NIE did anticipate the survival of the collective leadership, expect continued problems for the Soviets in Eastern Europe, suggest a forward Soviet detente policy in Western Europe, emphasize Moscow's likely desire to keep channels to Washington open, warn of continued trouble with China, and so on.

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23. The heavy Soviet presence in the Middle East and eastern Mediterranean is nowadays a fact of international life, accepted even by those powers most anxious to limit or contest it. Its beginnings date back to 1955 and 1956, when, as NIE 11-4-56 put it, "A concurrence of developments...combined to provide the USSR an opportunity to inject its influence forcefully into the Middle East." Subsequent NIEs took much the same estimative path, warning of strong Soviet ambitions in the area, noting the opportunities available to the USSR, and cautioning that there are constraints on Soviet behavior.

24. The general judgments of NIE 11-6-67, Soviet Strategy and Intentions in the Mediterranean Basin, have passed the test of time. For example: "...Soviet policy is likely to find numerous opportunities in the Mediterranean and its adjacent areas in the years ahead", and "...local conflicts might occur in which the Soviets would wish to support their clients at some fairly high level of risk short of actual intervention". The estimate also correctly judged that the USSR would not run high risks of an East-West conflict for the sake of the Arab cause. SNIE 11-13-67 of 20 July assessed what the Russians were up to in rearming the Arabs states. It correctly noted the likelihood of "a further influx of Soviet advisors,...(and) and increased Soviet military presence in Arab ports and military facilities."

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25. SNIE 11-9-68 of 18 January accurately totted up the account, noting that USSR faced "both new problems and new opportunities" that the Arabs were more dependent on it, that resumption of hostilities would produce a dangerous and unpredictable situation, and that Soviet and Egyptian policies on many important issues would remain congruent. It also advised that Arab ports and airbases could be used and might even be run in part by Soviet advisory personnel. The estimate also said, "The Soviets will probably continue efforts to make the Mediterranean a less favorable environment for US naval forces....". They have.

D. The Arab-Israeli Crisis

26. We published an estimate (NIE 30-67) on 13 April which addressed the possibility that a basic change might be occurring in the Arab-Israeli crisis. We noted that "Rivalries and disputes among the Arabs...create some danger of precipitating crises from which large-scale Arab-Israeli hostilities could develop," and that "The Israelis...would resort to force on a large-scale only if they felt their security endangered." Very true, but the estimate hardly conveyed to the reader that such a crisis would appear within two months. Moreover, the estimate concluded with the pronouncement: "In any event, the threat of great power

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intervention has had a sobering effect upon proposals to resolve the problem by military force, and the chances are good that it will continue to do so". The crisis that led to the war, however, proceeded from a series of miscalculations by the Soviets, Arabs and Israelis, in effect a circumstance unforeseen by the estimate.

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III. OTHER IMPORTANT TOPICS

A. China

29. The review of events connected with the Cultural Revolution looks very solid in retrospect. The judgment that China's domestic situation would remain tense and inherently unstable so long as Mao remained in control seems justified by last year's purge of Lin Piao and company. Estimates on the succession have yet to be tested. But the scenario in NIE 13-7-67 would not be greatly altered if written today; although the purge of Lin Piao obviously changes the lineup. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] The main conclusion on internal prospects was that despite the divisive impact of the Cultural Revolution and the remote chance of a coup against Mao, the basic thrust was toward preservation of national unity -- a judgment not particularly startling now, but considered fairly bold at the time.

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* The phrase is [REDACTED] not from an ONE document.

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